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AUTHORITY IN PRESENT-DAY RELIGIOUS TEACHING

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Several well-defined types of authority have appeared in the religious world: (1) An external authority which rested its claim on the Scriptures and tradition as interpreted by a hierarchical portion of the church, which culminated finally in the supreme, indefeasible, and solitary infallibility of the Roman pontiff when speaking *ex cathedra*, by which, if he is not placed above both Scripture and tradition, he is at least on a par with these and not less essential to faith. (2) The earlier Protestant view of an authority arising out of the Christian consciousness, as this is awakened and controlled, not by the Scriptures as a whole, but by the gospel in the Scriptures. (3) A view that the ultimate authority of religious faith is found in the Scriptures, not indeed as we now have them in any tongue, but as they were in the original manuscript when interpreted according to their divinely intended meaning. (4) The final authority lies not in the Scripture nor in the church, but in the reason alone, since here is the source of truth. Between these camps the advocates of authority in the Christian community have been mainly divided. The separation has not been always sharp; not seldom have the advocates of one position taken over some notions held by those of different views; but, in general, these have been the distinguishing notes of each group.

Recently, however, a change has taken place with reference to the whole question of authority. It is not so much that the question itself has been central—although in some important instances this is true—as that attention has been shifted to other values, with the result that redefinitions of authority have become necessary or authority itself has been retired into the background. Several particular occasions for this change are in evidence: a new view of the Scriptures, a different conception of revelation, a fresh evaluation of Christian experience, a pragmatic attitude toward truth, new emphasis on social values, the modernist movement with an altered estimate of history, and the exigent demands of religious education. The aim of this article is to show what use is made of the principle of authority in the more popular writings of the present day which have a bearing on religion.

First then, with reference to books which are based on the Scriptures. There are indeed those who without further ado accept the entire Bible as authoritative, or if they qualify their attitude they make no attempt at definition. They assume that their readers will take the Old and New Testaments at their face values. The simplest statement of this position is as follows. "The standard of authority here used is the Bible and final appeal is always to its pages."¹ Such a declaration is open to several interpretations, as that the author aims to present only what the Bible contains on selected subjects, without attempting to argue or justify its teachings, or that he believes in the infallible inspiration of the Scriptures, although he does not obtrude this belief upon his readers, or that, while he may not be unfamiliar with the results of historical criticism, he does not deem it wise to perplex his readers with these. Elsewhere in this book it is affirmed that the Bible is "certainly a literature, but it is not literature alone. . . . It claims to be a revelation of God. . . . There is a supernatural element which cannot be ignored."² This is the attitude maintained throughout a series of books of which more than one hundred thousand copies have been sold, and which have formed the basis of careful study. The large sale of works of this class shows that a

¹ H. T. Sell, *Bible Study by Doctrines*, "Prefatory," p. 5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

real need is met, it shows also that a great number, perhaps a majority, of readers do not wish to be disturbed in the background of their beliefs, but are satisfied with a middle-of-the-road teaching which is committed neither to pure traditionalism nor to advanced modern views, but is simple, direct, informing, and for the most part wholesome.

A series of documents, entitled *The Fundamentals*, published at intervals at the expense of "two consecrated Christian laymen," of which six volumes have already appeared, is sent to about two hundred and fifty thousand pastors, evangelists, missionaries, theological professors and students, Y.M.C.A. secretaries, college professors, Sunday-school superintendents, and religious editors in the English-speaking world. In these pamphlets of about one hundred and twenty-five pages each, such subjects are treated as the Virgin Birth, History of the Higher Criticism, Fallacies of the Higher Criticism, My Personal Experience with the Higher Criticism, the Bible and Modern Criticism. The general basis on which the articles rest is presented by Rev. James M. Gray, dean of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, in a paper on "The Inspiration of the Bible, Definition, Extent, and Proof."³ The author holds that the historicity of the Bible is the ground of its authority. The extent of this authority depends on the question of inspiration. While inspiration is defined only negatively, its object is stated to be not men as subjects of it, but the Scripture writings. These are, however, identified not with any writings in existence either now or, for that matter, for the past sixteen hundred years, but with autographs or writings of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul, John, and Peter. It is affirmed that the inspiration extends not only to the whole but to every part of these supposititious documents, form as well as substance, word as well as thought. The paper closes with this quotation from the deliverance of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in America in 1893: "The Bible as we now have it, in its various translations and revisions, when freed from all errors and mistakes of copyists and printers (is) the very Word of God, and consequently wholly without error." It is to be assumed that many of these books are on their reception

³ *The Fundamentals*, III, 7 ff.

relegated at once to the waste-basket, or read in part only to be rejected, while some are preserved for reference as samples of a style of religious teaching characteristic of a bygone age. When all allowances are made, however, no doubt thousands of readers welcome the presentations as wholesome testimony to the true faith and a much-needed corrective of a disturbing and dangerous radicalism. This conception of the basis of authority is unquestionably the simplest to affirm and in itself the easiest to maintain. It is a priori, dogmatic, wholly indifferent to historical inquiry, insusceptible of verification, and exists by the breath of its own self-assertion. In principle it is not to be distinguished from the authority of the Roman Church.

In certain other important particulars, authority as derived from the Scriptures has been seriously modified by the changed attitude toward these. Instances of present-day positions are as follows: "The moral and religious teachings of the Old Testament are not for us finally authoritative. . . . Christ alone . . . becomes our ultimate standard by which all that precedes must be tested. . . . We are therefore free to judge the Old Testament by Christ so far as ultimate truth is concerned." This newer historical attitude toward the Bible "does not allow the theologian of today to use the Bible in the same way as the older theologians . . . to quote indifferently from every part as of equal authority with every other . . . as for example the Westminster divines used it." Farther along, the author affirms that belief in the divinity of Christ is based on a series of propositions "all of which concern his character and personal relations." These propositions are not, however, to be received in the abstract, nor upon authority alone, but must be the outcome of one's own personal experience of Jesus Christ. Thus no appeal is made to proof texts or to dogmatic findings of councils or to great names or to purely theological significance, but the evidence is open to everyone to seek.⁴ In a similar vein, another writer affirms that the "doctrine of a uniformly authoritative Bible is being replaced by the inspiring sense of the spiritual worth of the Bible as disclosed through historico-literary criticism and the experience of the Christian community. The modern man yields

⁴ H. C. King, *Reconstruction of Theology*, pp. 152, 154, 244.

only to what he finds to be real.”⁵ Another writer claims that the attitude of the educated man toward the Bible is nothing less than a revolution. “Instead of the authoritative pronouncement of the Deity through arbitrarily chosen instruments, the Bible is now regarded as a great body of literature, one part differing from another part in glory.” The value of the Old Testament lies in the fact first, that it presents characters supremely worthy of reverence; secondly, that it records the discovery of our fundamental religious truths; thirdly, that it is essential to a correct apprehension of Jesus Christ.⁶ Still another writer intimates that his use of the Old and New Testaments is simply to illustrate the growth of ideas. He holds that the Bible contains a collection of purely human documents, extremely interesting from a historical point of view. He will treat it as we should treat Froissart or the Saxon Chronicle.⁷ One need not infer that this exhausts the author’s notion of the Scriptures, but it is suggestive as revealing the reverent freedom from dogmatic authority with which the most influential clergyman of Great Britain handles the sacred writings. Dr. Charles E. Jefferson in *Things Fundamental* asks, Is the Bible infallible? and replies, It is better to say that it is useful. Is it inspired? This may be known by the fact that it inspires. Is it unique? This may be established by comparison.⁸ These samples taken quite at random from men of constructive religious aims, whose works are widely read by inquiring and thoughtful people, are symptoms of a new attitude toward authority as related to the Scriptures. Such men do not believe less than those of a former day, but the content of their belief is in part different, the grounds of belief are not quite the same, and authority is not discredited but sought for in a different quarter. To many of those who are accustomed to the old wine, the new seems strange and distasteful. There are others, however, who have never been satisfied with the old and are seeking a more rational basis for their faith. There are still others in colleges and universities and

⁵ Shailer Mathews, *The Gospel and the Modern Man*, p. 53.

⁶ A. W. Vernon, *The Religious Value of the Old Testament*, pp. 1 ff.

⁷ R. J. Campbell, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p. 22.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 135 ff.

technical schools—and their number is increasing—who have never known aught else than the new, and these are destined to become centers of vital influence in ever widening circles of religious belief. To the Protestant to whom the Scriptures have hitherto been the sole source of authority to the exclusion of church and tradition, this newer attitude is fraught with far-reaching consequences.

In this shifting of the basis of authority from the entire Scriptures there appears a pronounced tendency to concentrate it in Jesus Christ. In some instances this is done with no attempt to set up a comparison of the teaching of Jesus with the rest of the Bible. He is simply drawn into the foreground and with but the slightest explanation given the supreme place. For instance, Rev. J. D. Jones of Bournemouth, England, inquiring as to the source of the authority of Jesus, refers it to his character, his knowledge, and his love.⁹ Professor Peabody takes a similar position: "The character of Jesus Christ speaks with its own convincing authority to the mind of the present age."¹⁰ Professor Rauschenbusch says that Jesus' secret was that he had realized the life of God in the soul of man, and the life of man in the love of God.¹¹ Yet neither Professor Peabody nor Professor Rauschenbusch seeks to penetrate into the ultimate secret of Jesus' authority through a metaphysical or theological construction of his person.¹² In other cases a definite comparison of the teachings of the Old Testament with those of Jesus results in the conclusion that the teaching of Jesus is paramount. Professor Zueblin, treating of personality, orthodoxy, authority, church and state from the point of view of religion, finds religion to be "man's relation to the universal, ultimate, and infinite." He holds that nowhere is the decay of authority so evident as in the religious world. This, however, is not to be interpreted as if people were becoming less religious, but they are passing from the religion of authority to the religion of the spirit. At present the emphasis is on the character of Jesus and his ethical teaching. "The moral power of the unsullied life of Jesus is an

⁹ *The Gospel of Jesus*, pp. 56 ff.

¹⁰ F. G. Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, p. 33.

¹¹ *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, p. 48.

¹² Cf. also Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* and *Christianity and History*.

increasing vital force." Accordingly, the coming authority will be that of the spirit, i.e., the spiritual life of democratic religion.¹³

Another writer in a more searching inquiry concerning the character of Jesus' teaching lays bare the ground of his authority. First, Jesus judged himself by other standards than ours; then, he taught after a different manner from the modern teacher, convincing and rebuking with the voice of God; finally, the secret of it all lay not in momentary impulse or simple-mindedness, but in his inmost consciousness—in the highest degree a God-consciousness. Hence "his authority may not be doubted, since it was the authority of the Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, and he who spake was the anointed one, the Christ of God." An even deeper ground of Jesus' authority is laid bare in the perpetual presence of the living Christ in the church. Professor Knox maintains that the appeal is to the test of reality, "to the Word still made flesh and dwelling among us, the present and living unity with the past, his church one with him."¹⁴ Accordingly, the authority of the historical Jesus is in no sense set aside or lessened. The Christ of the flesh has vanished only to reappear in mightier power as a spirit of life. His authority "is not external, but is a voice which speaks within us as well as to us." In harmony with this view, H. Rashdall adduces several considerations to sustain the claim that every Christian is to own the authority of Christ as the primary ground of faith: (1) Christ's own promise that the Spirit of truth should continue the enlightenment which he had himself begun, so that the indwelling Spirit is identified with the exalted Christ. (2) The incarnation is a perpetual fact in human life, hence not only the creative Logos through whom all things were made is united with the historical Jesus, but is also the mysterious Power working in every human soul. (3) Not the historical Jesus of Galilee and Judea is the primary ground of faith, but the "Christ that died, nay, rather that is risen again," i.e., the indwelling Christ. (4) If Christian faith regards this, i.e., the spontaneous assertions of the basal personality, as due to the indwelling Christ, religion may regard these as the voice of God within us, and philosophy as the "self-revelation of

¹³ Charles Zueblin, *The Religion of a Democrat*, pp. 85 ff.

¹⁴ G. W. Knox, *The Gospel of Jesus*, pp. 181, 84, 117.

the objective in our subjectivity."¹⁵ With this may be compared the declaration of Inge in *Faith and Its Psychology* (pp. 117-18) that the "testimony of the Holy Spirit" is the response of our spirit to the stimulus supplied by the Scriptures, and this he holds to be the primary ground of faith. Hence "the ultimate authority which alone is infallible is the eternal and living truth."¹⁶ The doctrine that both the historical and the living Christ is the ultimate source of authority is certainly that of Paul, but must be referred for its chief modern advocate to Schleiermacher. According to him the explanation is found in two facts, the God-consciousness of Jesus, and the perpetuation of that consciousness in his community.

This position is closely related to another, viz., the new theory of revelation. In the modern conception of revelation two demands are insistent, first, that it be continuous, and secondly, that it be intelligible. Revelation may be defined as the progressive disclosure within man's consciousness of the purpose of God which is also progressive. It is not therefore to be conceived of as something communicated once for all, closed, complete, unchanging, final, but as unfolding in dramatic form in history and in the experience of individual souls. Moreover, the change in the doctrine of God whereby emphasis is placed on the divine immanence has resulted in a change in the notion of revelation as something given not to but in men. Here the newer conception of the incarnation is nothing less than creative. "A revelation that is not an incarnation is no revelation at all, but blank mystery and magic."¹⁷ The incarnation is therefore not merely an event which took place once for all in Galilee and Judea, but is perpetually renewed in those in whom the eternal Spirit dwells. Still further the content of revelation as limited to the Scriptures points in the same direction. For here are truths, ideals, preparations, hopes, institutions, which must be developed under the constant inspiration and leadership of the same Spirit through whom they first emerged in the consciousness of men. As the Old Testament is

¹⁵ H. Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 139, 125 ff.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁷ W. De W. Hyde, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, p. 56.

incomplete without the further unfolding of its implications in the New, so the New Testament with all its comprehensiveness and finality is incomplete without the age-long evolution for which its teachings furnish the exhaustless impulse and the indefeasible type. The revelation must, however, be intelligible as well as continuous. "An attribute or act of God that cannot be translated into appreciable human terms can have no meaning for us."¹⁸ No message can be called a revelation which contains something unknown, sealed and delivered to a recipient, by him to be passed on to others, without having first become an organic and integral part of his own consciousness.¹⁹ Revelation is a disclosure of "something which can be construed by the mind, which is conveyed to it in terms of human thought, which can be expressed in coherent propositions."²⁰ The need of the intelligibility of revelation is enforced by three further considerations: First, the nature of religion. The essence of religion has been defined as the "intimate personal relation between the individual and the God whom he recognizes"; and since the Hebrew religion was marked by two features—its monotheism and its faith in the indissolubility of religion and conduct, "it is evident where we should look for the seat of authority and its test."²¹ Secondly, revelation and Christianity or the gospel must be regarded as opposite sides of the same shield; or Christianity may be conceived as the product of revelation whether as original with Jesus or continuous since his day. The meaning of Christianity may be ascertained and judged, according to Professor Knox, by the purpose which Jesus set before himself to realize among men—the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man; it may be defined as the religion of all who call Jesus Lord. Or with Harnack, one may describe the gospel as "trust in God, humility, the forgiveness of sins, and the love of one's neighbor." Here is nothing metaphysical, nothing simply historical, as the mode of Jesus' birth or resurrection, no theology formed on the Greek model. We are concerned only with the kingdom of God and its coming, with God

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. C. A. Beckwith, *Realities of Christian Theology*, p. 8.

²⁰ J. Caird, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. 1881, p. 75.

²¹ W. L. Courtney, *The Literary Man's Religion*, p. 8.

as Father, and the soul's infinite worth, with the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.²² We must then find Christianity not in Jesus alone, but also in his disciples, in the institutions which owe their initiation to him, and in the life which is continually kindled afresh by his spirit. Thirdly, a growing number of thoughtful people have become impatient at the subtleties of scholastic speculation, at the arrogance of dogmatic theologies, and are content to find in Christianity, not mysteries however ancient and transcendent, but the simple ethical values which suit the daily life, who as we shall see later resolve Christianity into a social program and in its service realize the highest satisfaction. The bearing of all this on the notion of authority is obvious. First of all, authority may have its roots in the past, but since the present is no less sacred and pregnant and divine than any earlier moment in the history of the world, authority must attach itself to the realities of today with a supreme claim. And secondly, since "all authority for man has been in the reason of man from the beginning," men now "are looking for that light in their own souls, and are unwilling to submit to any other authority."²³ Once the moral and religious consciousness is sure of its ideal and its task, it accepts these with a devotion, and if need be heroism, which has never been surpassed.

In our day the conflict between external authority and autonomy which has once and again broken out in the church has become greatly intensified. These two aspects of authority have been thus summarized: First, "authority is the right of the species over the individual, autonomy is the right of the individual with regard to the species." Secondly, "authority is a necessary function of the species for very self-preservation it may be transformed, it cannot disappear." Thirdly, "autonomy and authority are not fixed quantities, but states essentially stable, and always yet to be." Fourthly, "like every good teacher, authority should labor to render itself useless the method of direct intuition and experiment succeed the method of authority as the necessary effect of the development of the conscience and the

²² A. Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* pp. 90, 35.

²³ John Francis Dobbs, *The Modern Man and the Church*, p. 42.

reason." This applies both to the individual and to humanity.²⁴ These statements contain indeed a profound truth. One is perhaps not disposed to quarrel with the position unless it is to be accepted as an ultimate presentation of the case. Undoubtedly the race has a right to impose its experience upon the individual in such a way that he may be sure to enter into that experience and thus to share the racial, i.e., normal development. The truth in the above theory is that the human race is an organic unity, that its evolution has been in great part conditioned by common customs, institutions, and ideals, and that its dreams of the future are of a social good—its Utopias are all a social state. On the other hand, the individual has in addition to the impulse of imitation an innate tendency to initiative and divergence, from which has resulted much of the most significant progress of humanity. Yet there is no essential antinomy between authority and autonomy. Neither society nor the individual, neither authority nor autonomy reaches its goal—to say nothing of maintaining its existence—independently of the other; the two are reciprocally conditioned in the unfolding of human life.

This brings us to the basis of authority in experience. This is not new, since it has been the characteristic of every great religious teacher both in Christendom and beyond, but men are reflecting on this fact more deeply than ever before. When rather more than twenty years ago it was proposed to test Christian doctrine by an appeal to the Christian consciousness, the suggestion awoke a violent protest, on the ground that a certainty was about to be exchanged for an uncertainty. The certainty was regarded as the established teachings of the church, the uncertainty, the shifting and unreliable moods of subjectivism. Accordingly, those who trusted in dogma as the sheet anchor of Christian belief viewed with suspicion such a setting forth into the uncharted seas of experience. A score of years has, however, wrought great changes in this entire attitude. Many of those who were then hostile to this point of view, or at least suspicious of it, have come to give it a place not only by the side of dogma but even above it. They are now willing to

²⁴ A. Sabatier, *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*, pp. xviii ff.; cf. G. B. Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*.

acknowledge that dogma had its rise in the exigencies of experience and may authenticate itself in the experience of the present, and that unless it does so authenticate itself it lacks the truth and vigor which were its earlier marks. Principal Rainy gave expression to this condition in his address at the opening of the New College in 1904: "There is a craving in many minds for a fixed external authority which shall ensure our fidelity to at least the essentials of our faith. There is no such authority and no such security. Our only security against apostasy is to be sought in faith, in prayer, in the work of God, in the presence and power of the Spirit, in the maintenance of fellowship with our living King. . . . To place our trust elsewhere is an apostasy."²⁵ Moreover, a new generation rapidly increasing in numbers and influence is lighting its torches at those of Schleiermacher and Ritschl and blazing forth the truth that Christian reality has meaning only so far as it shines in the consciousness of the Christian man. Now it is no longer argued but rather assumed as an axiom that whatever may be true of the source of authority, its seat is the Christian consciousness. While, therefore, there is very general agreement that authority resides in this consciousness, one discovers much diversity of opinion concerning the relation of the two. A. Sabatier in his *Philosophy of Religion* appears to hold that our ultimate religious convictions are validated by a peculiar immediacy which admits of no further analysis. These are not explained by ordinary psychological experiences, but by rare, unaccountable moments of insight, extraordinary uprushes from the subconscious regions of personality which thus become the crises of personal and social religious history. A similar doctrine is advocated by the late Professor James. That is true which has forced itself into consciousness by an experience over which one had or has no control. In a comparison of rationalism with mysticism, he unhesitatingly declares in favor of mysticism. Rationalism has the prestige of logic and loquacity, but in contrast with intuition it will neither convince nor convert; intuition is from a deeper level, i.e., the subconscious and the non-rational, the sphere of inarticulate feeling. When, therefore, one has an intuition or feeling of reality as in religious experience, "something in you

²⁵ Quoted by J. Omar in *Faith and Freedom*, p. 24.

absolutely *knows* that that result must be truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it."²⁶

Other writers, while locating authority in the religious consciousness, attribute to it a more definite intellectual content. Dr. McComb affirms that "the ultimate standard is the religious consciousness in which all men have a share, enlightened, moulded, penetrated, and shaped by the teaching of Christ in the gospels, in the history of the church, and in the enlightening influence of the Spirit. Each age has its own vision of Christ. In the ultimate analysis it is by this vision that all must be tried."²⁷ Yet this is not final in the sense that posterity may not go beyond it. Professor Knox also maintains that the "fundamental appeal" is to "the experience of the individual."²⁸ Professor Royce holds that the inner light which shines in our own individual experience is adequate for all religious illumination. He will not, however, wholly explain this on the purely individualistic basis of Professor James or on the purely social basis of other recent writers,²⁹ but he refers it in part also to the reason as disclosing the superhuman divine unity of intelligence, to the will through whose action we meet the absolute, to morality which is defined by loyalty and involves religion, and finally to sorrow which, if it appears to hinder, at the same time really leads to the discovery and attainment of the religious aim.³⁰ The emphasis on experience has given rise to two attitudes toward the Scriptures and the dogmas of the church. In one the aim is to find the common element in the Scriptures, Christian dogma, and experience. With reference to the Scriptures, it is not indeed assumed that present-day experience is equal to the experience of the writers and actors of the Bible, but that the Scriptures themselves originated in great religious experiences, and these, although superior to experiences of today, provide

²⁶ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture III, "The Reality of the Unseen"; cf. J. B. Pratt, *The Psychology of Religious Belief*, pp. 243 ff.

²⁷ S. McComb, *Christianity and the Modern Mind*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁹ Cf. E. S. Ames, *The Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. vii; I. King, *The Development of Religion*, p. viii.

³⁰ J. Royce, *Sources of Religious Insight*, "Bross Lectures," 1911.

both the source, the impulse, and the type of religious experience of every age. In this view the ultimate authority of experience lies in the Scriptures, but this is seen in its reality and power only when it is reflected in the life of men now. With reference to Christian doctrine a change has taken place in the explanation of its nature and origin. It is now recognized that it came into being not to meet a speculative demand, and that its content is not simply metaphysical, but that it was born in the travail of great experiences, and that it had to preserve these experiences in the thought-forms of the age in which they began to be. And now, even though and so far as these dogmas are authoritative for belief, this is partly to be referred to the enduring experiences of the Christian life. The other attitude toward present-day experience as related to the Scriptures and dogma offers this experience as both test and interpretative principle of these. With reference to the Scriptures, a recent instance along this line is Professor W. A. Brown's *The Christian Hope*. A special interest is lent to his discussion of this high theme by the fact that a Presbyterian clergyman has felt moved to write an open letter, charging heresy, and expressing the hope that the author may be censured by the New York Presbytery for his subjective treatment of the Gospels.³¹ According to this attitude of Professor Brown, which increasingly prevails among Christian scholars, Christian experience of today, while not perfected and final, presents the most authoritative norm by which to judge the ideals and hopes contained in the Scriptures. Even the teachings of Jesus as they are recorded in the Gospels are not exempt from this ordeal. There is still closer agreement among scholars respecting the bearing of present-day experience on the dogmatic teachings of the past. Here Schleiermacher blazed the way; in the light of Christian experience he reinterpreted and, where necessary, by his magic touch transformed every doctrine of the church. He was followed by Ritschl, who stripped Christian doctrine of what he conceived as foreign admixture and adulteration from Greek metaphysics and scholastic philosophy, and later by Harnack and, in greater or less degree, by the entire Ritschlian school. In Great Britain Coleridge, in America Horace Bushnell

³¹ Cf., e.g., *op. cit.*, p. 86.

were only leaders of a long succession of virile and influential writers who have made experience paramount as a source of Christian truth. One of the most beautiful of recent statements of this attitude was offered by Dr. Gunsaulus in the Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale Divinity School in 1911: "Certain doctrines can never be held as true in the mind, unless they are lived willingly and lovingly." Spiritual life is itself the only way to the authentication of truth. Life must take up into itself the truth and live it—the truth of God, the divinity of Christ, incarnation, atonement, immortality, else it is known only as an abstract and formal proposition.³²

The question of authority has been deeply influenced by the pragmatic attitude toward reality. This may be roughly characterized as follows: elimination of the metaphysics which has been traditionally associated with Christian doctrine as furnishing its philosophical content; supplementing or replacing this "by that type of philosophy which finds its ultimates in values rather than in alleged axioms or intuitions";³³ disavowing the causal in favor of the teleological interpretation of reality; rejecting the static and substituting a changing and developing order of existence; abandoning a-priori deductive theology for the history and science of religion; substituting hypotheses for dogma; discarding transcendental idealism and the Absolute which this affirms, knowing only an empirical order whose contents are disclosed in and through the processes of life; religious experience conditioned not by knowledge of a divine Being conceived after the manner of the schools, defined with exhaustive logical precision, receiving its binding force from Bible or church or both, but by the fact that the conscious person is conterminous and continuous with a wider self—a MORE of the same quality—through which saving experiences come, that this wider self is other and larger than our conscious selves, yet not necessarily infinite or solitary, operating in the universe outside of us, with which one can keep in working touch.³⁴ The influence of these positions on authority is not far to seek. Traditional authority is swept clean off the boards. This

³² F. W. Gunsaulus, *The Minister and the Spiritual Life*, pp. 107 ff.

³³ Shailer Mathews, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁴ Cf. William James, *op. cit.*, pp. 485 ff.

means not that there is no authority but that it is differently conceived. For example, Professor Leuba holds that it is not necessary to understand or even to know God; the only question that signifies is whether he is useful. Life not God is the concern of religion.³⁵ Professor Patton maintains that the test of truth is action, and this takes place when the whole man is aroused.³⁶ It is evident that the principle of authority has undergone a transformation; it is not from without, general, dogmatic, finally and unalterably fixed, but is inward, personal, teleological, progressive, cumulative. The most penetrating statement of this attitude is that by Professor Knox: "Man is not *under* authority, but he wills authority." The scope of authority has been fundamentally modified; one is no longer bound to the transcendental—this has departed with the metaphysics which gave it birth—but to the intelligible, the ethical, to that which arises in and yields itself to experience.

Since religious attention has been so largely shifted from theology to social questions—family, property, capital and labor, charity, politics—it was to be expected that the principle of authority would be influenced thereby. Professor Peabody has said that the whole meaning of the Christian life is not found in "worship, praise, prayer, belief, conformity, confession, a creed, a state of heart, a submission of the will, a consent of the mind to Christian truth," but it is "ethical, social, political, industrial, human."³⁷ There are those who assert that religion is man's consciousness and conservation of the highest social values. Accordingly, religious beliefs are the varied and progressive attempts to define the meaning of these values.³⁸ Religion is thus conceived of as a form of social evolution, subject to the same laws and conditions which are valid in other regions of human development. And this holds good of the Hebrew and the Christian religion as truly as of the Greek, the Persian, and the Egyptian. This means that there is a natural history of religious as of other ideas, that revelation must be conceived otherwise than formerly, and that the sanctions of religion

³⁵ J. H. Leuba, "The Contents of Religious Consciousness," *The Monist*, Vol. XI.

³⁶ S. N. Patton, *The Social Basis of Religion*, pp. xiii ff.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 275-76.

³⁸ E. S. Ames, *op. cit.*, *passim*; H. Höffding, *The Philosophy of Religion*.

are derived not from a direct supernatural source or from an anticipated future world, but from the customs and necessities of the social organism. Dr. Smith, in a study confined to the Old Testament, of the agents, process, results, and tendencies of social development, seeks a "frank account of the growth and function of the various Hebrew institutions with some attempt at their comparison with like institutions in similar social growth."³⁹ Along with other social forces he traces the idea of God as developing and watches the working forms which this idea assumes and its actual bearings in the practical world. Professor Patton seeks for the social basis of religion; starting with the doctrine of one supreme God, he sets out to reinterpret the conditions with which religion is concerned, as, e.g., the fall or social degeneracy, regeneration or the re-incorporation of social outcasts into society, personal uplift through contact, influence, and suggestion, progress through peace and love, the Messiah or lofty inspiring leadership, service, social and personal responsibility, and the wages of sin as death.⁴⁰ Such programs as these are extremely attractive to all who are not obsessed by dogmatic theological assumptions which yield nothing to the modern spirit. They make no appeal to an occult authority which can be discovered and defended only by abstruse a-priori considerations accessible to learned scholars alone, but they present the actual conditions and customs and ideals of religious people in a way intelligible to the average man. The authority here under discussion does not indeed ignore God, but its chief attention is directed to the social body. It may perhaps be designated as immanent, as residing in the social order, as enforcing itself through custom, as varying with changing conditions. This social historical conception of authority has hardly more than begun to influence religious thinking, but it would be hard to overestimate its future development.

Two notions of authority underlie the "Modernist" movement in the Roman Catholic church. One takes its rise in a conflict between an authority which is purely external and rules by force

³⁹ Samuel G. Smith, *Religion in the Making*, p. 36; cf. H. Waring, *Christianity and the Bible*, p. 25; "The method of testing the claims of all religions must be the same, although the results be very different."

⁴⁰ S. N. Patton, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

without insight or sympathy, and without respect for the rightful autonomy of the individual, and an authority which has regard for the initiative and responsibility of the individual. When the former is claimed as authentic, Paul Sabatier asks, "What must a spiritual authority be which does not even dream of getting its decrees ratified by the conscience of its members," and "when it does not even occur to it that the sword is not enough, but that it ought to carry a light in the other hand, were that light but a modern lantern!" Under the influence of that for which Modernism stands he pictures a time when religious authority "will become a more inward matter. No longer will there be on one side omniscience and on the other absolute ignorance; . . . there will be on one side understanding and on the other obedience; the obedience of a being who feels his weakness and his want of guidance, but has already a glimpse of vaster horizons."⁴² The other aspect of authority on which Modernism relies is the principle that the judgment of history is the seat of authority. Newman without prevision of its consequences lent the weight of his great name to this principle in the oft quoted words, "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," by which he was carried over to Rome. He legitimated the development of doctrine by the well-known tests: (1) preservation of type; (2) continuity of principles; (3) capacity of doctrinal assimilation; (4) anticipation of further development, (5) which will obey a law of logical sequence, (6) by which the original creed is established and illustrated; (7) it bears the test of time. The Modernist has built on the truth in this foundation. Religion in common with all life is subject to the law of growth and change. The God of the Old Testament is not the same as the Father whom Jesus proclaimed. The meaning and in part the form of our beliefs differ from the "Rule of Faith" in the second century. "But the law of change is not inconsistent with the authority of belief. For though truth is changeless, its image as reflected in human minds continually alters. The living faith is the important thing; the forms which it employs in the vain attempt to be articulate are mutable and imperfect." Mrs. Humphrey Ward has proposed a somewhat similar notion. She conceives

⁴² *Modernism*, pp. 144, 142-43.

history not so much as the development of doctrine as the condition of arriving at truth. In contrast with abstract dogmatic theories, "history has come into being, . . . is divine and authoritative . . . marches slowly on its way; through many mistakes; through hypothesis and rectification; through vision and laborious proof; to an ever broadening certainty. History has taken hold of the Christian tradition." And she adds that history has at last presented to us the actual Christ and his working through two thousand years upon the world. "*There*, for the modernist, lies revelation, in the unfolding of the Christian idea."⁴² Accordingly, authority attaches, first to the simple Christian fact which history is able to disentangle from the legends and traditions of the past, and secondly, to the successive stages in the development through the Christian centuries of the idea which sprang from this fact—the whole a revelation in the present.

There are three other fields where the study of authority is extremely interesting; each is definitely educational and has produced a literature of considerable volume. Reference is made to Sunday-school helps, to works prepared for Y.M.C.A. classes, and to books of religious instruction published by the University of Chicago. Concerning books for use in the Sunday school, one discovers two opposite tendencies in the church. The first follows the traditional lines of teaching from the point of view of the unqualified authority of the Scriptures and dogma, the second is in harmony with the modern trend in education, historical interpretation of the Bible, and the meaning of life as disclosed in the theory of evolution, in psychology, and in the study of social forces. Attention is here directed to the second of these two tendencies, and particularly to what it proposes for young people. The mental life of the child is studied with a view to adapting all teaching to the specific stages of the child's intellectual, moral, and religious needs. Since this is the time of rapid physical development, in which some functions undergo swift transformation, the consciousness of sex awakens, and home, family, friendship, and love begin to assert their claims, the time also of the quickening and pursuit of ideals, of dreams, hopes, possibilities, and partial realiza-

⁴² *The Case of Richard Meynell*, pp. 621-22.

tions, the choice of religious educative material is adapted to this condition. Where the International Lessons are followed, this becomes sometimes more difficult than in the more freely chosen courses. In either case, the following tendencies are increasingly effective, by which religious instruction is brought into line with instruction in other fields: (1) to quicken the mind of the child by an orderly presentation of the simple elements of religion; (2) to make him aware of both the natural and the social world into which he has been born; (3) to guard and promote his normal physical development; (4) to teach him his rights and duties in relation to his fellow-men. In the Old Testament special use is made of geography, excavations, history, comparative religion, parallel movements in social and religious life among other peoples, and references to parallel Scriptures. In history, biography is employed for its presentation of heroes and ideals—the whole treated in a way as simple and natural as the history of the social and religious movements of other great people are described. One author shows how the plagues in Egypt followed the natural order of these events. Another says of the crossing of the Red Sea that God saved the Hebrews through one of the forces of nature—a strong east wind which drove the waters back and the people passed over in safety, to which another authority adds, “probably the people had no knowledge of the physical agency employed.”⁴³ Describing the battle of Beth-Horon, it is said that the identical thing happened which occurred to the Austrians at the battle of Solferino: a hailstorm of unusual severity broke upon the armies, the hail was driven full in the face of the Amorites and it seemed as if the shafts of Jehovah were piercing them. “A poem was written to commemorate the event, just as the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ was written to commemorate a victory of the American army.” Many other instances might be cited, but these are sufficient to illustrate the method employed. No question is raised as to an external authority, or authority of a special kind; the story is simply interpreted (“as we should treat Froissart or the Saxon Chronicle”), made more vivid indeed by historical and individual

⁴³ Cf. *Leaders of Israel*, Intermediate textbook, first year, Part I, p. 44; Kent, *Heroes and Crises*, *ad. loc.*

parallels among other religious peoples. Thus the lesson simply presented is left to make its own impression and the divine authority being implicit is even more effective than when presented in the traditional manner. It is not truth or fact plus authority, but the authority of the fact or truth itself under interpretation.

In the rapidly growing literature published by the Y.M.C.A. for use in classes among its membership, one discerns everywhere a central purpose and organic unity. The aim of the studies is to stimulate men to higher Christian ideals and more efficient action. Manliness and efficiency are the keynotes. The object is thus immediately practical. When one adds that the great majority of those who have to teach these lessons are not technically trained in ethics or religion or theology, and that those who are taught are engrossed in practical affairs, one can but admire the good sense which has presided over both the choice of themes and the prescribed method of treatment. What then is the authority enshrined in these studies? Unquestionably it lies in part in the fact that such studies effect the results in ideals, in character, and in service which they are designed to produce. In their efficiency for a definite aim lies their reason for being, and authority is interpreted from a pragmatic point of view. Very little theology is made use of, although what there is frequently reveals itself in a point of view or in the shaping of a phrase. If apologetics is the theme, then both the questions and the mode of presentation differ radically from standard works of reference on apologetics or in periodicals addressed to cultivated and thoughtful readers.⁴⁴ It seems more like a lunch counter where a hungry traveler snatches a few bites while the train waits, and the bell rings for him to hasten, than a quiet dining-room where at his leisure one may go through an elaborate bill of fare. Critical questions are lightly touched, rarely in a radical or controversial spirit. The results of historical and literary criticism are taken for granted. Almost an exception to this general regimen is the *Book of Isaiah* by Professor George L. Robinson, where, in spite of the almost entire consensus of scholars to the contrary, the judgment is expressed that we have no adequate

⁴⁴ Cf. R. A. Falconer, *The Truth of the Apologetic Gospel*; F. S. Schenck, *Christian Evidences and Ethics*.

or convincing proof of the composite character of the book. Accordingly, references to Cyrus in chapters xlv, 24-xlv, 25 are "explained best by supposing that the prophet projected himself into the future from an earlier age."⁴⁵ Where the aim is to provide material for Christian workers, the treatment is much the same.⁴⁶ The presentation of Old Testament characters, Jesus Christ, and Paul is preceded by certain pertinent general considerations and followed by discussions of well-known Christian workers through the centuries. Attention is everywhere concentrated "upon the duty and opportunity to live to help men to know God and to lead them to Jesus Christ." The favorite fields are history and biography,⁴⁷ for here the personal and social aspects of life are the characteristic features. In this field ideals emerge and are tested, and the moral qualities that crown endeavor with success or darken it with defeat are most vividly portrayed and are also most impressive. There is a predetermined avoidance of questions which arouse controversy. Attention is concentrated on subjects which are personal, historical, social, ethical, religious. Slight stress is placed on literary matters. One writer says in his introduction that "the teacher will find himself dividing his material perforce into about three classes: knotty questions that he straightens out and lays aside; material that he teaches; vexing problems that clothe the mind like sackcloth. Only the second class mean anything to his students, and only these things are to be taught—but taught with enthusiasm, in enforced oblivion of non-essentials and unsolved difficulties."⁴⁸ The Hebrew prophets are especially serviceable. Never have these men and their message been so popular or so influential as at present. Their religion knew of no God who was postponing to a future life all the good he had for them. Here and now, on the earth and among its people, his interest was focused, his will present, and his activity manifest. With respect to authority, the same remark is to be made as was

⁴⁵ Pp. 13, 137.

⁴⁶ Cf. H. A. Johnson, *Studies in God's Method of Training Christian Workers*.

⁴⁷ Cf., e.g., L. K. Willman, *Men of the Old Testament*; G. F. Kent and R. L. Smith, *The Work and Teachings of the Earlier Prophets*; W. W. White, *Studies in Old Testament Characters*; G. L. Robinson, *op. cit.*; A. G. Leacock, *Studies in the Life of St. Paul*.

⁴⁸ L. K. Willman, *op. cit.*, p. v.

offered concerning the Sunday-school literature. The books are written from sincere conviction, they are to be studied and taught with enthusiastic, single-hearted conviction, they are to be received without question as true and incorporated at once into character and life.

A few words of explanation concerning the relation of authority to the newer movement in religious education may preface the reference to works published by the University of Chicago Press. The matter of authority was comparatively simple when religious education was limited to the catechism, to certain doctrinal statements, to assent to dogmas, and to the immediately accredited teaching of properly ordained clergymen. It was hardly more complex when this instruction was confined to the Bible, in which texts of Scripture were recited, followed by question and answer, always within the confines of denominational dogmas and interests. The aim was to place in the mind of the pupil the exact notion exactly as formulated by the mind of the teacher and the section of the church represented, without increase, or diminution, or modification, or doubt. The material was ecclesiastically formulated dogmas and certain interpreted portions of the Bible. The method might be described as the process of education by injection. The teaching was dogmatic. The habit of the teacher was to convey the truth as it was given to him, and the ideal of the pupil to receive in the way of memory and absorption without assimilation, except as related to certain earlier instruction of the same sort.⁴⁹ A different theory of religious education as represented by the Religious Education Association moves toward a different end by the use of different materials and methods. This theory of education is not indeed new, since it has had a long series of distinguished advocates, as Comenius, Rousseau, and Froebel. But what they divined from a sympathetic insight into the nature of the child, combined with a more or less restricted view of the world, is now becoming scientific, self-conscious, and broad-based. The new psychology makes possible a kind and accuracy of observation and experiment and interpretation of the religious nature of the

⁴⁹ For this theory of religious training, cf. a Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education upon Sunday schools, cited in Burton and Mathews, *Principles and Ideals for the Sunday School*, p. 29.

child never before attainable. The new pedagogy holds that for religious education no other principles are valid than are sought after and applied in so-called secular training. If the Bible is to be the chief source of material for religious culture, i.e., of the ideals and motives involved in Christian character and civilization, then it must be used not as fetish or talisman or storehouse of mysterious but unintelligible truths to be received by implicit faith, but "brought into relationship with the human spirit through the same channels of sense, intellectual perceptions, reasoning processes, and emotional response that are employed in connection with other types of educational material."⁵⁰ Like any other body of literature both the understanding of it and its influence depend upon intelligent apprehension and responsive feeling. Moreover, the end sought is not simply preparation for another world whose conditions are either unknown or supposedly far otherwise than those of the present life; on the contrary, attention is drawn forward to this world, the world which offers itself to physical science, to economic, civic, and political well-being, to poetic contemplation, to human service, in a word, to the only world of which we have any knowledge through experience, in which alone the character of living men is formed. This means not the disappearance of mystery in human existence with which traditional authority is concerned but only a shifting of its center, changing its point of view, and therefore a difference in its content. Mystery is no longer the focus but the fringe of interest. Religious ideals are saturated with ethical values, and religious education is preparation for the school of earthly experience and service.

The most considerable attempt to illustrate and enforce the point of view here indicated is offered in a series of Constructive Bible Studies prepared and published under the auspices of the University of Chicago. The intention is ultimately to provide suitable textbooks for religious instruction, based mainly on the Scriptures, for all the grades of the Sunday school, together with numerous volumes for adult classes which include church history and sociology. In the working out of this proposition, there are, e.g., a general introduction to the Bible, several volumes devoted

⁵⁰ George E. Dawson, *The Child and His Religion*, p. 54, University of Chicago Press, 1912.

to the heroes of Israel, to Jesus, and to Paul, the single books of the Old and the New Testament, and finally Old Testament history, Gospels, Acts, and Epistles treated from the point of view of more advanced historical study. Many of these books are already published, others are in preparation. The special point of interest for us is the attitude of these studies toward authority. This is perhaps best stated by Professors Burton and Mathews. Having set aside the suggestion that the teacher is to rely upon his own authority or that of his church, the authors outline their own ideal of the teacher's task: first, to find the exact meaning of the Scripture writer; then, to recognize the child's individuality with his right to investigate and to raise questions; further, for the teacher to become a humble interpreter of the Scriptures and obedient to the truth; finally, to lead the pupil to study the Bible honestly and to obey the truth. This is based on the conviction that the Bible is not a collection of atomistic proof-texts but the literature growing out of a historical process, the record of an unfolding revelation of God. In this one may distinguish stages of revelation and so degrees of authority, until these culminate in the perfect life of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵¹ This point of view may be regarded as representing the general attitude of all the writers in this admirable series of Bible studies. One's attention is arrested by several common qualities. First, the use of the story in its simple concrete features.⁵² Secondly, the very great use of biographical material.⁵³ Thirdly, the naturalness, simplicity, and reverence with which all the material is handled. Fourthly, harmony with the findings of historical and literary criticism of the Scriptures.⁵⁴ Fifthly, the treatment of miracles and moral difficulties as adapted to the developing intelligence of pupils. Sixthly, letting the truths and facts of the Scriptures make their own unforced impression upon the pupil. Finally, awakening a spirit

⁵¹ Burton and Mathews, "The Basis of Authority in Teaching," *op. cit.*, pp. 29 ff.

⁵² Cf. Georgia L. Chamberlin and Mary R. Kern, *The Child in His World; Walks with Jesus in His Country*; Georgia L. Chamberlin, *An Introduction to the Bible for Teachers of Children*; C. S. Ferris, *The Sunday Kindergarten: Game, Gift, and Story*.

⁵³ H. W. Gates, *The Life of Jesus: a Manual for Teachers*; T. G. Soares, *Heroes of Israel*; L. W. Atkinson, *The Story of Paul of Tarsus*.

⁵⁴ Cf. H. F. Waring, *op. cit.*; H. L. Willett, *Studies in the First Book of Samuel*; W. R. Harper, *The Priestly Element in the Old Testament; The Prophetic Element in the Old Testament*; Louise S. Houghton, *Hebrew Life and Thought*.

of further inquiry and investigation, with supreme reference to the effect of all this upon character. In all these studies the principle of authority is not external but immanent, not legal but spiritual. It is inseparable from the structure of the Bible and may be trusted to assert its full power in the consciousness of the student. Nowhere in books for Bible study will one discover a finer illustration or more adequate use of the principle of authority than in these Constructive Studies.

From this survey of the field of authority several facts emerge: (1) If the Scriptures as a whole are regarded as authoritative, there is little or no attempt at definition of this, there is a manifest avoidance of controversial material, attention and interest are directed upon those portions which are most immediately available for the quickening of individual and social ideals. Different values are given to the Old and the New Testament respectively. The force of "proof-texts" is seriously impaired. The historical spirit rules, and the Scriptures are studied not for their science or theology so much as for their disclosure of God and the way in which man is to attain to the fulfilment of the divine purpose. (2) The chief authority of the Bible is concentrated in Jesus Christ. Emphasis is laid upon his character and his consciousness rather than upon his metaphysical nature or the particular points of his teachings. This reference is expanded to include the continued influence of the Spirit of Christ in the Christian community or the power of the unfolding and living truth. (3) Authority is derived less from the mysterious than from the intelligible aspect of revelation. And since revelation is discovered in the ethical and religious instead of the speculative and metaphysical, authority itself becomes practical. As the revelation is continuous, the authority is likewise continuous. (4) Authority has not only its seat in the individual but also in the race as developing. The social group has, therefore, the right to impose its progressive customs and ideals upon its members, in order that these may reproduce the type of life which the group is striving with whatever of self-consciousness to realize; this, however, not to the entire elimination of the individual's initiative or divergence. (5) Experience is recovering the place in the field of authority which it formerly held in the New Testament and in Augustine. Thus, it is located partly in

immediate and irreducible feeling, partly in the processes of reason, and partly in the supreme purpose by which personal action is determined. Experience receives something from the New Testament and Christian dogma, but it also contributes something in the interpretation of these. (6) So far as pragmatism is able to validate its claims, it brings into the foreground the teleological aspect of authority, and instead of a perfectly rounded and fixed body of truth, it binds the developing person to a flying goal, to an ideal the more vital the more it springs out of felt values and ever unfolding needs of the will to live. (7) From the social point of view religion formerly conceived of as an affair dealing with the transcendental, is presented as a conservation of social values whose meaning becomes clear the moment the old theological terms are translated into their social equivalents. And whereas, hitherto, there have been those who could neither see the force nor understand the meaning of religion when couched in technical phrases, now, these persons under the social interpretation, find it both easy to comprehend and of irresistible binding power. (8) "Modernism" is impressing on us an aspect of authority which is always in danger of being lost sight of, namely, that under changing forms of statements of belief, authority remains inviolate and concerns itself less with the symbol than with the reality of which it is always the shifting but never wholly adequate expression. (9) In the more recent advance in educational ideals and methods a new courage has overtaken the principle of authority. This is evidenced, first, by the growing and solid conviction that only the truth is safe, and, secondly, by a pedagogic approach to the truth in which values to the developing consciousness determine the content and method of teaching.

In all these aspects and changes of authority one becomes aware of the subtle operation of a mighty force which can be nothing else than the Spirit of God. What transformations are yet to arise no one would be bold enough to forecast. The more spiritual, however, the more certain these will be. Only this we know, that the word of God is ever more surely established. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. *So is every one that is born of the Spirit.*"